

Dispeace

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[0 : 0 0] So this evening we're going to look back at Jeremiah chapter 8 as part of a wider thematic sermon this evening, which is the first of four.

I'm going to be doing four next, well it's next two and then there's a break, so I'm away and then the following two Sunday evenings, a four-part series that's entitled, Miserable as Sin. So, you know, I know how to give the congregation a good time.

But I think it's a really important subject and I feel in my own heart, I can't speak for anyone else, but certainly in my own heart I feel that the seriousness of sin isn't what it should be. And when that's the case then obviously the glory of the gospel isn't what it should be either. It has a knock-on effect.

And so really what I'm looking at this evening is an introductory study and we're going to look at the theme of peace or dis-peace as a result of sin, which will lead in the next three sermons to division, disintegration and death, okay? Happy times.

So that's what we're going to be looking at. And generally speaking, I'm not trying in this series to give a theological definition of sin. I will give a definition of sin, which I hope is theological. But I'm more intent to look at what the Bible says about the effects of sin, the effects of turning away from God in the world in which we live and in our lives, because that's where the rubber really hits the road for us. We can have all the theological descriptions and explanations for sin that we want, but unless we see it in reality in our lives and in the world in which we live then it's probably not going to have that much effect. I want us to be able to see what God says about sin as He sees it, because the trouble is a lot of the time we think we see sin as we see it, and it's not that significant maybe in our lives, but the Bible wants us to see sin as He sees it, and therefore it makes everything about grace and the gospel all that more attractive, which I hope will come round to in each of the sermons of course, in particular this evening as we celebrate the Lord's Supper together. But I'm going to begin with a definition of sin, which I'm jumping forward from week 16 of Sunday 16 of the New City Catechism. I'm not going to look at it, I'm going to say what that definition is. If you're visiting with us, we're looking at the New City Catechism in the morning and reciting each one of them.

[2 : 55] Before 16, the question is what is sin? And the answer that gives is sin is rejecting or ignoring God in the world He created, rebelling against Him by living without reference to Him, not being or doing what He requires in His law, resulting in our death and the disintegration of all creation. It's a very fulsome and helpful definition. It's probably if someone asked you what sin is as a kind of theological person, if you are, you would say it's breaking God's law. That's what it is, breaking the Ten Commandments. And that's what we've been brought up to believe, and rightly so, because that's what it is. But I think there's been a danger for a misunderstanding of that for us where we've seen the law as like just a set of rules. And it's easy to break rules, isn't it? We've seen the law as a set of rules rather than a relational law, a breaking of faith, a breaking of relationship with the living God, so that we easily fall into being moralistic. It's what we do rather than what we are, what we are in our being. It's simply our behavior sometimes rather than our motive and our heart. And when we just think of breaking God's law like breaking the speed limit, then we often are thinking of sin in a very shallow and legalistic and moralistic way. But it is much deeper than that, because remember the Ten Commandments are laws of love. Love the Lord your God with all your heart. Love your neighbor as yourself.

That's the basis of these commandments. They're not simply moral law rules, right and wrong. It's about relationship with God. And breaking the law is leaving God out of our hearts.

It's taking His good things sometimes, things that are not wrong, and making them ultimate things, worshiping them, putting them first, ignoring and rejecting and relegating God to the sidelines. It's not coming to terms with His standard of love and the seriousness of rejecting His rightful claim to lordship over our lives, because of who He is in the reality of the world in which we live. Now sin, the word itself, has got lots of different definitions in the Bible as well, which help us if we are simply speaking about definitions. It talks about missing the mark or falling short or being on the wrong path or doing anything contrary to God's nature, something deserving of punishment. It's a twisting of the straight path. It's being rebellious. It's being guilty. These are all words that help define and explain what sin is in our lives. But what I want to do this evening for a little while is look at what sin looks like in one area, and do that by looking at the whole biblical concept of shalom, the biblical idea of peace. Verse 11 of Jeremiah 8, and Jeremiah is a book spoken to God's people. I'll come back to it in a minute, but he says, They have healed the wounds of my people lightly. This is the false prophet saying peace, peace, for there is no peace. And that's what I want to look at for a little bit this evening, because peace in the Bible or shalom, that word in the Bible, it means much more than we sometimes take peace to mean we think often of peace, kind of as the absence of war, and which it is. But it's much, biblically, it's much more than that. Shalom in the Bible is a very, very pregnant word, a very powerful, strong word and a word full of meaning. It means wholeness and harmony between God and His people, and between God and His people and the created world in which we live. It's about being absolutely completely at peace within ourselves and with God. It's primarily relational. It's related to justice and love and fruitfulness and blessing and joy and all these great Bible terms for good life. Probably the best visual description of what shalom means is the idea of walking with God in the garden.

At the very beginning Adam and Eve walked with God in the garden. That is that right relationship in a beautiful place where we were, humanity was in that great relationship with God the Father, and everything was right, and everything was in its proper place, and people loved one another, and God loved us, and we lived in a perfect environment as the fabric around which we existed, a righteous and a just place. Shalom, peace. Shalom.

Sin is, we've gone into darkness on the side, sin, very good timing, thanks. I was just when I started talking about sin, and I cranked up the heat in the place as well just while we're talking about sin and hell and everything else. So sin breaks God's shalom. That's the concept I want to get out of the truth, sin breaks God's shalom. Dispeace. That's what sin does. Sin means that we have broken faith with God, so that right relationship is gone, and instead of God making the rules of love, we make them, we make them up. We change them, we redefine them, we usurp God in His rightful place, and we even choose our own path back to Him, thinking that we know better how to get back to God than God Himself knows, and it's a path that we never reach Him with, because we don't know better than God. We've broken faith with Him, and it brings dispeace at the very core of our being. It means not only breaking faith, it means just simply being wrong with God, and that's so big. It's so big because He is loving and just, and yet His justice demands that a breach of His peace, we talk about a breach of the peace. This is the ultimate breach of the peace, but it's punishable by separation from Him as the author of life until it can be put right. So it's knowing, it's knowing how sin is significant to, we can't just throw up our hands and say, well, that's just an old fasting concept of sin. This is what

[9 : 42] God says, and what we recognize through His Word and through His truth, being wrong with God, breaking faith with God, and it means dispeace. It means being wrong everywhere, that everything is wrong, because we have broken faith with God and we have rejected His shalom. The consequence is acrimony in the world, in relationships, in the workplace, in the family, in the neighborhood, in our hearts. It means bad blood, it means bitterness, it means dislike, it means hostility. And we see that, don't we? We see that right from the beginning. The glorious, the glorious teaching of Genesis 3 in all its horror.

But immediately, we see dispeace between God and humanity, and we immediately see dispeace between Adam and Eve. She did it, he did it, it's her fault, she'd never have given me her. Dispeace and bitterness and dislike and hostility, which immediately tumbles into the fratricide, the murder Cain killing Abel, and then nations with all their wars and cultures and relationships between races, between people and animals, and between people and animals and the environment and God and one another. That's the story of the Bible. We need to remember and recognize that that's what the Bible speaks about. It's a record of dispeace, so it's bloody. It's a bloody record. It's a sore record. It's brutal in many of its parts. It speaks of judgment and pain, and it's honest and true to the life that we live. It speaks of depression and discord and separation and questions and doubts and fears. And it's a mirror into the reality of the world in which we live and into our hearts. And what do you do? What do I do? With God's word, we have many options. We can recoil from it. We can avoid it. We can choose to reinterpret it so it's more cuddly, and we can ignore it, which is often what we do, because we find it hard. But we can hear it. We can, in all its honesty, we can hear it because it is also the only way to the restoration of Shalom, to the restoration of God's world and of our relationship with

Him and with one another. But in order to do that, and I guess this is the motivation behind the series, it always means taking sin seriously. It means taking sin seriously and seeing it as God sees it, and not just shrugging our shoulders saying, and the worst thing of all is saying, Jesus died for me. He's paid the price of my sins. I can do what I like. Now that is all, and I don't think any of us think that consciously, but sometimes we live like that. There's a kind of visual shrugging of our shoulders by the way we live, which says that sin doesn't really matter. So Jeremiah here speaks into that, and we remember verse 11 as part of that hard reading that was read for us by Ross. It was written to the people of God, and specifically exposing the false teachers who were taking God's word and were transforming it, were changing it, were treating it like plasticine, which they could mold into any way they wanted. The prophet and the priests, everyone deals falsely, not just the prophets, everyone as well. They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying peace, peace, where there is no peace. They were dealing, they thought exactly what I've been saying, it's often the case in my own heart, they were dealing with sin as it was a light thing, an insignificant thing. They'd lost sight of the horror of sin, the way God sees it. They knew God's story. They knew about the fact that they'd been enslaved in Egypt and all the slavery that that symbolized in their lives. They'd received

God's salvation, they'd heard God's word, they'd seen God's judgment, they'd seen his salvation. But here they were, by this time, they were laughing it off, as if it was something insignificant. And they had taken God, and they had turned away from Him, and they therefore had experienced in a very physical way that they'd been removed from the promised land.

And they'd been re-entered into slavery, as it were, in Babylon, and they knew again this peace. And verses really, I guess, verses 4 to 9 or 10, just example the fact that they'd turned away. And it explains what it was like that they had turned away from the living God. They were deceived, they were unrepentant, they were thoughtless about their behavior, they were self-absorbed, they'd stopped listening to God, they'd stopped thinking about who He was and who they were in relation to Him. They were greedy for being accepted on their own terms. They wanted popularity and gain. They twisted God's word to suit themselves.

[15 : 39] They didn't think sin was serious anymore. And I just love that, which I think we can all really associate with what it means just at the end of verse 12, where it says they just didn't know how to blush. Isn't that a powerful image? They didn't know how to blush anymore. Nothing, there was nothing that shamed them. All else in creation knew the rightful place. But they simply didn't. Even the stork in the heavens knows her times and the turtle dove, the swallow and the crane, keep the time of their coming. But my people know not the rules of the Lord. And they'd forgotten how to blush. It's not amazing that physiological expression of inner shame. They'd forgotten how to blush because they'd turned away. And verse 10, second half of verse 10 reminds us that they had started, they'd been listening to themselves, listening to their own people, from prophet to priest.

Everyone deals falsely and they were saying that there was peace. But it wasn't God's peace that they were enjoying. God often spends time highlighting false prophets in the Bible.

Use them more than anything or anyone else. And we know they often come as angel of light. And these false prophets were coming as angels of light. They were coming as teachers of the law, teachers, representatives of God. And they were offering peace. But they weren't offering God's peace. It was peace on their own terms. It was peace that didn't deal with the reality and the problem of sin and the dis-peace that it caused. Ezekiel 13, verse 10, I think that maybe is coming up on the screen. It's the same kind of issue where Ezekiel's is precisely because they have misled my people speaking about false prophets, saying peace where there is no peace and because when the people build a wall, these prophets smear it with whitewash. So it was really saying they're just covering up their behavior with whitewash. They're whitewash. Tombs really, you know, Jesus speaks about that as well, doesn't he? There's nothing really behind the peace that they're talking about. It's purely surface. It wasn't dealing with their heart. It wasn't dealing with the sin and the rebellion and the dis-peace that was there. No wrestling with God's justice and God's, the demands of God's laws of love and His offer of salvation. Therefore, no fruit. Matthew 7, verse 15, again, Jesus taking up the theme of the Old Testament, beware of the false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, inwardly ravenous wolves, you will recognize them by their fruit. So there was no fruit from these false prophets and there was no peace and there was no reconciliation. And the problem was that the heart of the matter was the matter of the heart and they were avoiding that. And we sometimes avoid, we can do lots of things to avoid the condition of our hearts. And that's where the dis-peace begins. So I'm going to stop at this point and ask a question. Are you pursuing God's peace or your own? This is written to God's people. Are you content with a broken peace?

That is where we're not allowing God to be God. And we make up God's mind for Him about what's truth. We tell ourselves that God is just like us. He's undemanding and He's just simply jolly. And we look for peace in good circumstances or in acceptance or in popularity or in avoidance of any kind of conflict or any suffering. We look for it in parties and in wealth and in relaxation and activities and in hobbies and solitude and running after good causes and trying our best for other people. But it never brings the internal conflict to an end. You can't run from God. He demands that we look at Him eyeball to eyeball and that we deal with the inner dis-peace and that we speak to the living God and recognize who He is. Now I recognize there's a great struggle in being a Christian.

There's a daily battle in the spiritual life that doesn't seem very peaceful at all. I'm going to come back to that in the end, which will be not too long. But what does God say then? Well, God says here, and He says it in Jeremiah chapter 6 in verse 14 as well, they have healed the wound of my people lightly saying peace, peace where there is no peace.

[20 : 39] So what He's saying is saying peace on our own terms is not peace at all. Whatever it seems like, it's not peace God's way, not Shalom. We have He's saying, what is He saying?

You have to deal with God. You have to listen to God. You have to wrestle with God. You have to turn to God. You have to plead with God. You have to face God with all the dis-peace that you sense and feel and know and all the doubt and struggles and take it into His presence.

That's the place we must go. There's no peace anywhere else. And God is saying here, there's no peace away from me. Our temptation is often, is it not, in our struggles to turn away from God. And He says there's no peace there. Making rules for ourselves, disobeying rules for ourselves, running from Him, we will never find peace, though we often look for it there, because we struggle with grace. There's no peace away from God. Why is that? He says because there's a wound we need to deal with. That's why they have healed the wound of my people lightly, or they've treated the wound of my people lightly. Sin is that wound. That's what I'm getting at this evening with dis-peace. You see, there's a wound we need to deal with sin is what brings dis-peace, division, disintegration and death. And it can't be fixed with a sticking plaster. And that's what He's saying that the people, the false prophets are trying to do. Now, when I was about eight or nine years old, I was playing in the back garden with my friend, and Annie will know this story because she's involved in it. And I, he was playing with a hockey stick, as you do, the back garden, jolly old hockey sticks. And he took a massive swing with this hockey stick, and I happened to be standing right behind him. And I got a hockey stick right on my forehead here, full blast, burst my head open, blood everywhere. I'm not exaggerating at all in the slightest, blood everywhere. But mum and dad weren't at home, Anne was at home, and Barbara, my bigger sister also. And they took me inside, whaling and greeting as I was, and put a sticking plaster on it. Because that's what they thought would work. And I was quite happy with that. And I was quite proud when mum and dad came home, and I had this great big, bloody sticking plaster on my head. And they took one, look at it, and went pale, and said, I think we'll need to take you to hospital. That needs stitches. Okay, it's a simple story. But it's really what God's saying here. You know, you can't deal with serious wounds with a sticking plaster, broken leg or wound to the head where the skull is showing or whatever it might be.

And it's so easy for us to do that. There's a wound, a spiritual wound that we must deal with, and the sticking plaster of our own solutions simply don't work. They might seem to work for a while, and they might be quite enjoyable, but they are not the answer. Where do we look? And it's interesting, Jeremiah asked that question at the end of the chapter.

Is there no physician? He's looking for an answer. And of course, the prophecies of the Old Testament, going into the New Testament, provide the answer. The answer is Christ.

[24 : 33] Christ is the answer. Christ is the answer. Again and again and again, I repeat, ad nauseum. Christ, and living in a relationship and trusting in Him as Lord and save it as the answer.

John 14 verse 27, you'll know this one, won't you? Peace. I leave with you, Jesus said, My peace I give you, not as the world gives, do I give you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. That's why Jesus Christ came. He knew all about the Old Testament, breaking of Shalom. He knew all about the need for peace in the hearts of humanity with their God and with each other and with the environment. And that is what He came to do.

He came to bring this peace. And it's not peace necessarily as we sometimes think or we sometimes can experience at one level, humanly without Him. It's different. It's unique. And that's what we, that's the answer to sin and it's the answer to the brokenness and the disharmony and the dispeace that we experience day to day in our lives. We see it, of course, in the great prophecy of Isaiah 53 verse 5, He was wounded, you know, they weren't taking the wound seriously, but Jesus was wounded to the point of death and hell.

It's a, seems that a soft word for what He experienced. He was wounded for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. But upon Him was the chastisement, the punishment of God that brought us peace and by His stripes we are healed. So we see that He takes the punishment for our rebellion, for the dispeace that our sin has brought into our relationship or our separation from God and from one another and from this world. Because He had to be just. He had to, in His justice, see that a price was paid for this rebellion and this sin and this wrongdoing. And in this unique and mysterious divine experience, we have the ultimate expression of dispeace on the cross. That's what the cross is. It's dispeace, it's foolish. Where there's alienation from God the Father, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? There is also that great hostility and rejection from the people that He came to save. Crucify Him. Crucify Him. And there's the physical darkness at noonday, the highest point of the day where there's even dispeace in the creation that will not look on this moment of ultimate dispeace in order that we can know peace. So Colossians 1 follows that through in the theology of the New Testament, for in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace very clearly by the blood of His cross. So what He has done is a peace offering. Now it's interesting in the Old Testament, you know, the sacrifices that you have in the Old Testament. The peace offering that was offered in the Old Testament was the only offering where meat was given to God and returned back also to the people and the priests. So it became a meal. It became a fellowship meal. It was a peace offering.

You know, what's the great mark of being at peace with someone? Come on round for something to eat. You know, we've struggled to get on with one another. Let's eat together and make peace. It's a sign of unity. It's why this Lord Supper is such a brilliant picture of Shalom because it's peace with God and it's peace with one another. That's why unity matters so much to the Lord Supper and it's peace looking forward to that great reconciliation environmentally also. It's a healing relationship. That's what Shalom is. That's what sin takes from us. And when we adulterate with sin and when we caress sin and when we think it doesn't matter and when we laugh with sin and when we're partners with it and hold hands with it and skip down the road with sin, it's just, it's a denial of His Shalom. And we're looking for that reconciliation and healing in life in places that simply can't be found.

[29 : 20] So I finish with one further question. And I think you'll probably have been asking this question through the sermon anyway. If God's peace is so great, why is it so hard? Is that a great question? Why is it so hard? Why is the Christian life so hard? Why is there so much turmoil and difficulty if we know in Christ Shalom? Why are we tempted to give up? Why do we not pray? Why do we not follow? Why do we find it so easy to revert back to sinful lifestyles and thinking? Why is that? Is it really God's peace? Is it really what you're saying it is? Well, we need to recognize, I think it's really important to recognize when Jesus says, I come to bring peace not as the world gives. In other words, He's saying it's not the kind of peace you sometimes will expect. It's not the peace of the graveyard for a start. But it is a paradoxical peace, okay? And with that we need to close by looking at Matthew 10, 34, because you'll have thought of this. Do you not think that I have come, Jesus, to bring peace to the earth? I have not come to bring peace by a sword. Does that unravel everything that I've said? What does that mean? Is Jesus is telling us that His peace is different from what you think His peace is? It's not what we think, because sin is defeated on the cross, but it's not yet destroyed. And so when He brings us to life, and when

He brings us His shalom into our life, then He awakens a conflict, a war, a sword, a spiritual sword. And Jesus, when we come to faith, we enter into a battle, don't we? That's what we know the Christian life to be. Yes, it's shalom, but because there remains sin in our heart, this great internal battle of what we want and what we don't want, and what God's will is and what our will is, and because we swim against the tide in the world in which we live, and because we have the thrashing opposition of the evil one who is defeated and tries to cause as much damage before He is ultimately destroyed, there's a battle, and there's a sword, and it's a different kind of peace. Living in His grace, living in His shalom is in this life a life of warfare, and that's what it's tough. That's why the people backslide. That's why they close their Bible. That's why they stop going to church.

That's why they give up the faith. That's why they rather get drunk. That's why they rather sleep around because that's much easier. There's no battle there, but there's no peace.

There's no answer. There's no shalom with God, and there's no ultimate victory because the battle that we are in here is a promised victory, and we have the power of the Holy Spirit to take us through it, but it's not easy. So guaranteed victory is in Him, but it's not easy. Preachers have got to stop getting up the front of this church and preaching sermons that say the gospel is easy, and it's easy being a Christian, and it's just good news because it's more than that. It's a battle and it's a struggle because of the world in which we live. But God's peace is the only shalom there is, and it's greater than our circumstances, and it's greater than the opposition we face, and it's greater than our own hearts with all the darkness that sometimes we feel is in our hearts, that remains in our hearts. Promises to forgive and to strengthen and to be with us, and the great thing is that in the battle as we look to Him, that's where there's shalom.

You're tempted, I know you're tempted maybe this evening to run away from God. You're tempted to close that book that speaks His words. You're tempted away from His people.

[33 : 52] All I plead is that you keep turning back to Him. It's the only place of shalom, of genuine healing, of hope, and of life. All else is deception, all else is lies, and all else is covering up a wound that needs the healing of Christ, and the presence of Christ and the company of Christ, and we rejoice and give thanks in that. And we're going to celebrate together now, very shortly, the Lord's Supper, as we, I hope, will take time to think about that great peace. And if you're not a Christian, then you'll really think about where you're looking for peace, shalom in your life. There's only one place we believe, and you must find your peace in relationship with Jesus Christ. Amen.